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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of a U.S. student's one-month stay at Ruprecht-Karls Universitaet in Germany. The paper's author explains that as a doctoral student in higher education administration at Bowling Green State University (OH), she fulfilled an optional program requirement called "Global Understanding" and was accepted for a short period of independent research at Ruprecht-Karls Universitaet in Heidelberg. The object was to understand the institutional culture, structure, policies, and the specific aspects of student life at the Heidelberg institution. The paper notes the six-century-long history of this university and the role it has been playing in the academic world as a source of progress and knowledge. To understand the directions toward which various activities of the institution might tend to develop in the future, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with administrators, researchers, students, and faculty; consulted the documentation offered by her hosts; and took part in various cultural and social activities organized mainly for the international guests of the institution. (BT)

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Heidelberg - The Dynamics of German Academic Traditions Within the New Global Context

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This paper is the result of a one-month experience in one of the most prestigious German universities. As a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at BGSU, during the last summer I fulfilled an optional program requirement called "Global Understanding." The International Relations Office of Ruprecht-Karls Universitaet in Heidelberg accepted me for a short period of independent research.

I was seeking to understand the institutional culture, structure, policies, as well as the specific aspects of student life in Heidelberg. I had the opportunity to learn about the six-century long history of this university, about the role it has been playing in the academic World as a source of excellent scholarship and progress of knowledge. I also tried to understand the directions in which various types of activities performed by the institution tend to develop in the future.

In this respect I conducted a series of interviews with administrators, researchers, students, and faculty, I consulted the documentation offered by my hosts and I took part in various cultural and social activities organized mainly for the international guests of the institution. This paper is just an actual snapshot of "The Living Spirit," to whom this university is dedicated.

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I have chosen for my Global Understanding experience to travel to Germany for a short internship in the International Relations Office of Ruprecht-Karls Universitaet in Heidelberg. This gave me the opportunity to understand the actual trends in German higher education and, especially, the way in which the six-century-old University of Heidelberg is adapting its traditions and strategies to the new demands of a global society.

The education in Germany is free, at all levels, for German and foreign students as well. The budget of education comes from the government, the local land government and also from the federal government. Although according to the German law, institutions can not take tuition fees, in certain Southern lands, students who need more time than it has been assigned to finish a certain program have to pay for each additional academic year.

Except for certain fields, such as Medicine, Law and Psychology, where the *numerus clausus* (limited number) policy is still practiced, in Germany high school graduates can chose freely the university where they want to study. This political decision has been adopted, in 1977, by the governors of the states (lands), in order to open the access of students to institutions of their own choice, and also to increase the overall number of students.

Governance and Organization

In Germany the universities are under the control of the local governments of the lands. Which means that the University of Heidelberg is one of the institutions controlled

by the Ministry of Research and Education of the land of Baden-Wurtenberg. The highest percentage of the university budget comes from the state, being allocated by the Parliament of Baden-Wurtenberg. Another important revenue source is represented by research grants. The University of Heidelberg is one of the German universities that would commonly obtain a great number of research grants, coming from different organizations, such as state ministries, federal ministries, the industry, the EU, or from some American organizations. The German Research Foundation has actually ranked Heidelberg as the fourth research university with 165 million mark research grants within a period of 3 years. There is a national competition for these research grants, won on the basis of a national evaluation.

The need to face the international competition on the market of higher education determined recently the old and traditionalist University of Heidelberg to adopt and implement strategic planning. Now the whole administration of the university is undergoing a reform process, which aims, among other changes to improve the budget allocation among the institution's sub-units, i.e. departments, faculties, chairs, institutes, etc. Formerly, the rector used to have the greatest power of decision. He was assisted in making the financial decisions by an Executive Board (Verwaltungsrat), composed of all the members of the Rectorat, plus a number of four professors elected by the university senate, one member of the so-called middle teaching staff, one member of the student body, and one member of the administrative staff. In addition to these voting members, there were also some consultants, usually senior administrators, who had not the right to vote. This structure continued to function till December 2000. Afterwards, a totally different system has been implemented. It is the result of a national reform project for

higher education institutions. The financial decision-making power is now given to the institutes, so that their needs may be met in much shorter time, and in a more satisfactory manner. This project promotes the competition concerning quality, as well as the responsibility concerning the way money are spent. The allocation itself is based on competitive criteria. Actually, it is a formula allocation procedure, using a large number of indicators, such as number of students, of Ph D students, of people pursuing the second PhD (Habilitation), required in German universities in order to become a faculty member, number of publications, research grants, etc.

The new system has as the central decision-making structure a University Board, which is a control body, in a way similar to those existent in the corporate world. This is composed of 6 members from outside the institution, and 7 members from the institution. The rector is still the one who is responsible for the institution's management, but this board controls the rector's activity. The members from outside the institution are outstanding personalities in various fields. For instance one of them is a Nobel Prize awardee, another one is a former head of an important German bank, and so on. The members from the university are professors from different fields, one student, and one senior administrator.

International Relations

The International Office is part of the central administration of the university, the so called Decanat. It has two main divisions, one dealing with incoming students and researchers, and the other one, with students and professors from Heidelberg who are

going abroad for study or research. The activity of these two divisions is closely interrelated. There are many exchange programs, partnerships with other universities, among which an important number are with Chinese universities.

Heidelberg has an outstanding reputation in medicine and biological sciences, as well as in political sciences, philosophy, psychology, and oriental studies. The DAAD, the "Alexander Humboldt" Foundation, and some other foundations or foreign governments offer grants and scholarships to many researchers or students. Others choose to come to Heidelberg, independently, on their own. However, all of them need help from the International Office in order to have the immigration formalities done, to find a place to stay, to learn how to apply, what certificates they need, to understand the relationships they are supposed to have with certain offices in the university and with the local administration. The international students go through one week of general orientation and then, whenever they have a problem they may come and ask for advice at the international office. For issues concerning their study programs they are usually referred to academic advisors. Each institute has up to 3 academic advisors.

The university offers to its international guests the opportunity to participate in a number of social and cultural events, and also in some local trips. In this way they get to know Heidelberg, and other interesting places in the region, get to know many German professors, other local personalities, and also get to know each other.

Due to the increasing number of student exchanges, the ministries of education of many German lands have acknowledged the necessity of introducing the Bachelor degree, in order to make it easier for universities to relate the credentials of incoming

foreign students to German equivalents. Traditionally, a higher education program in Germany takes 5 years and winds up with a Master Degree.

According to the international officers, the number of students from former communist countries and from China is constantly increasing, while the number of American students, as well as that of students from some South-Eastern Asian countries is decreasing. The students from the former communist block however have to prove to the German consulates in their own countries the fact that they have the financial means to live in Germany.

The number of Chinese applicants is also increasing, although they have a lot of problems with the language, and only those applicants who can overcome this obstacle, actually become students. Because of the language barrier, some recently introduced graduate programs at master level are offered in English. However, at the doctoral level only in exceptional cases the English language can be used in the work and writing of the doctoral thesis. The scientific advisor, the so-called "doctoral father," is the one who can eventually agree to this solution.

The university has no department concerning the Student Life. In Germany, this is the responsibility of a national organization, called Studentenwerk. This deals with housing, and dining facilities for students. It also deals with financial aid for German students, as well as with psychological counseling, daycare centers, and different cultural activities, providing rooms for meetings, or exhibitions organized by the students. The number of places available in the residence halls is rather small. That is why most of the students have to live off-campus. In the apartments of residence halls students live in multicultural communities. The Studentenwerk has the policy of housing together

students from different countries, because multicultural communities are usually preferred to the so-called "cultural ghettos." Anyway, special situations and incompatibilities are taken into account and, by no means, people who can not get along with one another would ever be obliged to live together.

Because of the scarce housing resources provided by the Studentenwerk, the International Office established the so-called Zimmervermittlung department which finds rooms available off campus, intermediating between the landlords and the international students or researchers.

The Ministry of Research and Education of Baden Wurtenberg tries to offer the international students the possibility not only to be integrated in the German society, but also to preserve their own cultural identity. The International Office provides the necessary funds for special cultural events, such as, for example, the Chinese Spring New Year Festival.

The university of Heidelberg has an important number of exchanges with higher education institutions in the US and Canada. About half of these exchanges are based on bilateral agreements with the partner universities and the others are mainly based on a special program of the Ministry of Education in Baden-Wurtenberg, which consists of state-to- state exchange agreements. The students from Heidelberg who want to have an American experience are able to choose among a large number of universities in the US or Canada. The students who are eligible to come to the US should have already had finished their first part of the study program, and should have taken their intermediate examinations. They apply for graduate studies in American institutions. Certain American universities, however, would only accept them as undergraduate students, even

if they may take courses at the graduate level. The problem of tuition fees is solved on the bases of reciprocity. In certain situations the students who come within the state-to- state exchange program might also get a stipend, and the land of Baden-Wurtenberg finances a preparatory four weeks language course, each year in September, supporting the students' tuition and accommodation during this period. The American and Canadian students go to Heidelberg to study, German Language and Literature, Political Science, Art History, European History, Biology, etc.

The German students who apply to these exchange programs need to have a good academic standing, a good command of the English language, and also to be outgoing persons, who would engage in extra-curricular activities, acting as ambassadors of their own university. Annually an average number of 80 applications are submitted for the 55 places available in different American universities. The German students who participate in the state-to-state exchange would first go through a seminar that prepares them for their study abroad experience. Those who participate in bilateral exchanges are usually put in touch with American or Canadian students coming from the partner universities, so that they can get useful first hand information about the institution. Some American students come to Heidelberg with Fulbright scholarships.

The largest number of exchanges, however, is with European universities. During the last academic year a number of 400 students from different European universities went to Heidelberg within the Erasmus program, and another 400 German students went to study for one or two semesters in other European countries. Erasmus is a program based on bilateral agreements, and the University of Heidelberg has 300 bilateral agreements with 180 European partners. Sometimes they have 2 or 3 agreements with the

same university in different fields of study or research. The exchange students in Erasmus are undergraduate students and the most difficult problem for them is the German language. That is why there is a need and actually a current to introduce more courses taught in English. A great number of Eastern European countries are now taking part in Erasmus. The students coming from these countries usually do not have problems with the language, but the 400, oftentimes only 200 euro/month stipend is not enough to cover their living expenses, and most of them do not have any other financial resources.

Apart from the cooperation agreements within the European program Socrates-Erasmus, the university has many other bilateral common programs with institutions from Australia, New Zeeland, Chile, Israel. There are certain common programs, including summer language courses. There is also a regional program between the land of Baden-Wurtenberg and other European regions, like Wales in Britain, Rone-Alpe, in France, Catalonia in Spain, Lombardy in Italy.

The bilateral exchanges based on reciprocity are practically opened for all the fields of study. The students do not have to pay for their tuition, but they have to cover themselves the travel and living expenses. The tuition fees might constitute sometimes a barrier for these bilateral cooperation programs, because the partner institutions loose certain amounts of money coming from tuition fees when they send exchange students to Germany. In the particular case of medical studies these fees are usually very high and that is why there are not many exchange students at the Medical School in Heidelberg.

The University of Heidelberg is also a member of the Coimbra Group, which is a network of European universities working together to achieve common academic and research goals. This group enhances the cooperation with central and Eastern European

countries offering support to institutions of higher education in those countries which are not eligible for the official European programs, such as some states of the former Yugoslavia. A way to enhance the academic and scientific progress in these countries is the "Hospitality Scheme." This is a program, giving to young scholars from countries with political and/or economic problems the opportunity to spend up to three months in-a university member of the Coimbra Group, having access to the resources of that university for their research. They are practically given the chance to overcome the isolation.

In spite of their historical traditions and great reputation, German universities are not too highly ranked on the very competitive market of higher education. In order to promote its image, the University of Heidelberg adopted seven years ago a strategic initiative, which consisted in creating the Alumni International Association. Prior to this, the students who graduated would have taken their Diplomas, and their transcripts leaving the university for good. The Alumni International Association is trying to make them feel connected to their Alma Mater, even after graduation, is trying to keep them in touch with their younger or older colleagues from Heidelberg, with the professors and researchers in various fields. During the last 30 years, there have been approximately 35,000 foreign students enrolled at Heidelberg. A huge number of letters were sent to international graduates from Heidelberg to inform them about the initiative of creating the Alumni Association. The DAAD provided the funding for this project, which includes the publishing of the Alumni International Review. Meetings of the Heidelberg Alumni were also organized, but since they are spread all through the world, and their personal time schedules cannot be easily matched, it is rather difficult to bring them together in

Heidelberg. A solution to this problem is being provided by the Internet. The alumni actually have access to a huge electronic database, where they can find out "what's new and cool" in Heidelberg in any academic field, and then they have the opportunity to communicate with professors and researchers on different topics of interest. There is also an e-program of continuing education in the so-called "virtual faculty".

The Alumni International Association does not make any attempt to raise money for the university from its former students, no matter how well off and important personalities those might be. As Dr. Alfred Bayer, the man who is the heart of this initiative told me, "this is not about fund raising, it is about friends raising." These people are valuable ambassadors of the University and they promote the image of the institution through their career achievements.

The revolution in communications makes it possible for the academic communities from all over the world to actually build one big community of scholarship and scientific research, in which each institution of higher education aspires to play an important role, earning its recognition and prestige. Ruprecht-Karls Universitaet of Heidelberg is faithfully striving to accomplish its mission, **"to serve the living spirit, the truth, justice, and humanity."** This outstanding representative of German academic traditions is now aware, more than ever before, that the Living Spirit is the spirit of the entire humankind.

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